

U. S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation



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# CHILD ABDUCTION RESPONSE PLAN

An  
Investigative  
Guide

2nd Edition  
(2008)



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Federal Bureau of Investigation  
National Center for the  
Quantico, Virginia 22135

# CHECK LIST

## UPON ARRIVAL AT THE SCENE

**If appropriate, immediately request additional personnel, including departmental supervisors, to respond to the scene and assist in the initial assessment.**

- \_\_\_ Verify the accuracy of the complainant's information. Obtain the basic facts as to who, what, when, where, and how, including the name/age/sex of the missing child, and obtain an up to date description of the child including clothing, possessions, etc.
- \_\_\_ Determine the exact circumstances of the disappearance, the present custody status of the missing child, as well as information related to any suspect(s) and/or vehicle(s) involved.
- \_\_\_ Provide a concise description of the child as well as information related to any suspect and/or suspect vehicle to your communications/dispatch desk for appropriate dissemination. If appropriate, consider the use of an AMBER Alert.
- \_\_\_ Obtain the most recent photograph of the missing child for immediate dissemination to all appropriate law enforcement agencies.

11-30-11

- \_\_\_ Identify and separate any witness(es) to the incident, to include the complainant and the last person to have had contact with the missing child. These witnesses should immediately be interviewed, one-on-one, and their statements compared with known information. Be sensitive to interviewing a child witness concerning suggestibility.
- \_\_\_ Secure the missing child's room as a potential crime scene as it may be necessary to obtain sources of known samples of the child's hair, body fluids, and fingerprints from bed linens, caps and/or hooded clothing, hair brushes/combs, and toothbrushes. Consider obtaining a search warrant if appropriate.
- \_\_\_ Secure the missing child's last known location as a potential crime scene and keep this area protected until it has been properly processed. Consider obtaining a search warrant if appropriate.
- \_\_\_ As soon as practical, notify your local FBI office to request the assistance and resources necessary to further determine the nature of the missing child incident.




## WITHIN SIX HOURS

- \_\_\_ Conduct a well-coordinated, detailed search of the immediate area, especially locations where a child may hide. If the child is reported missing from his/her home, ensure that a thorough search is made of the house and all child-size areas therein, including any other structures and all vehicles located on the property.
- \_\_\_ Broadcast all critical details of the missing child incident to all other precincts/stations within the department, as well as other surrounding local, county, and state agencies.
- \_\_\_ Using marked vehicles, set up an initial roadblock canvass. Identify all occupants of each vehicle, documenting identities, descriptions, and, if appropriate, a brief statement for possible future use. If relevant information is obtained, ensure it is immediately communicated to lead investigators. During this initial roadblock canvass, ask for consent to search the targeted vehicle, specifically the trunk area, in an effort to recover the victim.
- \_\_\_ Document all initial assignments, leads, searches, etc., as quickly as possible to ensure that the information is incorporated into the case management system in a timely manner.
- \_\_\_ Use the Free Narrative to obtain an uncontaminated account of the events

surrounding the victim's disappearance from individuals close to the immediate incident.

- Identify and secure the missing child's comfort zones and any other relevant location as potential crime scenes, i.e., a source of forensic evidence. Consider One-Time Opportunities relating to a search effort, recognizing that failure to conduct a search in a timely manner may result in critical forensic evidence being lost.
- Initiate a preliminary neighborhood canvass, to include consent to search within each structure, for the missing child. Ensure that all neighborhood investigation is immediately documented and provided to the appropriate administrative personnel to avoid future duplication of effort.
- Document the presence of all unoccupied vehicles located in the target area. Conduct vehicle registration inquiries on these vehicles and match the names of the registered owners against the results of the neighborhood canvass investigation interviews.
- Obtain all computers from the missing child's residence. Obtain all recent e-mails (both to the missing child's family and from the missing child's family), chat room conversations, blogs, computerized files, and/or computer data that is present on the missing child's family's ISP server. Computers should immediately be analyzed by





appropriate computer support personnel with specific expertise in this area.

- Determine if any technical equipment is needed, for recording or tracking purposes, for any mobile telephones or other wireless communication devices. Such devices can include those utilized by the missing child, members of the missing child's family, or suspects developed in the investigation. Contact a Technically Trained Agent (TTA) at the local FBI office for additional resources/assistance, if necessary.
- Initiate a request to obtain local telephone records, including text messages, for all relevant telephones.
- Obtain a "dump" of all information from mobile telephone towers in each relevant area identified in the initial investigation.
- Identify/contact all area locations (banks, ATMs, bars, liquor stores, convenience stores, residences, etc.) that use video equipment for security purposes. Review video surveillance recordings for possible lead information (e.g., identification of persons in the area who may be witnesses and/or suspects).
- Ensure a plan for a ransom kidnapping scenario is available if it becomes necessary.

## WITHIN 24 HOURS

- Establish a command post well away from the crime scene and/or the missing child's residence to ensure appropriate security.
- Begin to develop a corroborated and detailed Timeline of the missing child's known activities up to the time that he/she was reported missing.
- Determine the time frame between when the child was reliably last seen and when he/she was discovered missing. It is crucial to establish this Window of Opportunity independent of the missing child's parents, caregivers, etc.
- Attempt to obtain all available unwashed clothing of the child for future evidentiary purposes.
- Seize any paintings, drawings, diaries, journals, and any other personal writings of the missing child.
- Seize all e-mail and computerized files/data written by or to the child. Seize all computers (obtain all recent chat room and/or online conversations; computer to be analyzed by field division CART personnel), pager, or mobile phone routinely used by the child.



- \_\_\_ If known fingerprints of the child are unavailable, attempt to obtain items known to have been handled by the victim (hairbrush or comb, toothbrush, personal papers, computer, CDs, toys) from which latent prints may be obtained.
- \_\_\_ Obtain an item containing odor of the missing child to serve as canine scent material. Consult appropriate experts on proper collection protocol.
- \_\_\_ Search the missing child's school locker, if applicable, to include a search for reports, diaries, any school computer access, school library access, etc.
- \_\_\_ Contact local commercial trash companies and coordinate thorough searches of all area trash containers prior to their scheduled pick up. If appropriate, contact the local sanitation company and attempt to segregate the trash already collected from where the missing child disappeared.
- \_\_\_ Consider the utilization of one of the FBI's regionally-based, Child Abduction Rapid Deployment (CARD) teams. Contact the local FBI office for a CARD team request.



## WITHIN SEVEN DAYS

- Designate a single spokesperson on behalf of all involved agencies. This spokesperson should be physically located away from the command post and should not be assigned other investigative responsibilities.
- Coordinate all press releases through the designated spokesperson, including, when possible, statements by the prosecutor's office, medical examiner's office, etc.
- Utilize the media as appropriate to immediately disseminate flyers of the missing child and to publicize the investigation's toll-free telephone number, the dedicated Post Office Box, and the case's Internet address.
- Obtain aerial photographs of all relevant areas to ensure the depiction of current conditions.
- Begin to establish independently corroborated Timelines as well as alibis for all significant family members and associates during the Window of Opportunity. Conduct thorough investigation to establish the truthfulness of self reported alibis by additional neighborhood canvassing, mobile telephone tracking, etc.



- Identify and interview employers/co-workers of appropriate family members and associates regarding any recently exhibited unusual behavior.
- Document the parental reaction to their child's disappearance, noting that without a baseline for comparison, it is very difficult to assess this behavior. Do not let personal perceptions of how a parent should react to his/her child's disappearance unduly influence your judgment.
- Consider the use of tracking devices on appropriate vehicles as the investigation progresses.
- Keep an open mind regarding all possibilities including the missing child being: abducted, lost, involved in an accident, running away, involved in a domestic/custody matter, or involved in a false allegation.

## VICTIMOLOGY

### **The Child Victim Background**

**Questionnaire (see Appendix D) was developed to assist in obtaining this critical information. At least four different sources (family members, neighbors, teacher or coaches, good friends or schoolmates, church youth leaders, etc.), each familiar with the missing child, should be asked to fill out a form. By assessing these forms, law enforcement will develop the proper background information regarding the missing child's personality traits which should greatly enhance the overall investigative effort.**

- Document any recent physical changes (weight loss/gain, hair style change, etc.).
- Obtain a detailed description of all items of the child's last known clothing, jewelry, or personal belongings (such as backpack, lunch box, purse, etc.), including brand names, sizes, and date/ location purchased. Attempt to corroborate with a non-family member.
- Immediately obtain as close to an exact duplicate of the child's last known clothing and/or personal items as possible. If appropriate, immediately publicize to the media and consider incorporating into the missing child flyer.
- Obtain proper parental releases for medical/dental records including previous x-rays, eyeglass prescriptions, etc.



- \_\_\_ Identify and separately interview all immediate and extended family members (to include their spouses, boyfriends/girlfriends, or other close associates) who reside in or frequent the residence.
- \_\_\_ Continue to develop a detailed Timeline of the child's last known activities up to the time they were reported missing. The Timeline should be independently verified/corroborated by non-family individuals.
- \_\_\_ Continue to assess the Window of Opportunity (i.e., the time frame of the incident) regarding the child's disappearance. This must be independently corroborated by non-family members who have no self-interest in the ongoing situation.
- \_\_\_ Identify hobbies and/or membership in clubs, sports teams, or any other organizations. Determine the most recent participation/events by the child. Identify/interview all members, including adults.
- \_\_\_ Obtain and review all current schoolwork, any other personal writings, any diaries, and any drawings. Include any entries into a personal computer (home and school) or interaction with any online computer service.
- \_\_\_ If appropriate, identify and interview all employment associates/co-workers.

- Determine who has normal parental control over the child. This would include biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, divorced/estranged parents, or any others who exercised parental guardianship of the child.
- Determine any history of illicit drug and/or alcohol abuse by the victim or any family member.
- Identify any criminal history/activity involving the victim or any family member.
- Identify any psychiatric history pertaining to the victim or any family member.
- Determine the current financial status of the child's family, including any large or recent debts, any life insurance policies involving the child, etc.
- Identify and interview any babysitters or routine caretakers of the missing child.
- Consider/evaluate the culture of the family and any bearing that may have on the incident. This would include a history of arranged marriages, racial or ethnic prejudices, etc.
- Determine whether Child Protective Services (or similar agencies) have ever responded to the residence and, if so, the nature of the incident. Ensure all reported family members are identified and thoroughly interviewed.



